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ABSTRACT

There are problems in the field of English teaching on at least three levels: research, teacher training, and the students. Research in the teaching of English must be preceded by research in English, language variation, and native language acquisition and by further work in descriptive linguistics. A significant problem in current language research is that the different disciplines engaging in it begin with different assumptions concerning the nature of language variation. Anthropologists and linguists consider variation normal manifestation of difference, while psychologists and educators view variation as a deviation from a norm. More emphasis should be placed on training teachers to hear, distinguish, and analyze the language of their students. Teachers must learn about the systematic nature of language, how languages differ from each other, how they change, the difference between oral and written symbolization, and the structure of communication. Techniques used today for evaluating a child's language ability frequently discriminate against nonstandard English-speaking children. It must be remembered that every child comes to the first grade with a relatively well developed and systematic language which cannot be characterized as random or illogical. More research into the problem of stigmatized speech is also needed. (PMP)

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Current Theory and Knowledge for the Teaching of English

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A question which requires one to assess the current status of a given art or movement is usually subject to severe criticism for it is almost always easier to see where we are after we have been there than while we are going through it. Of this problem, philosopher William I. Thompson recently observed: "If you went around in England in the 1790s asking how it felt to be living in an age of industrial revolution, most people would not know what you were talking about". ("Planetary Vistas," Harpers, December, 1971, p. 72). The situation is analogous for the teaching of English, where the edges of various movements or periods have been predictably difficult to measure. It is only infrequently that a man sees clearly enough the core of the cultural transformations under way in his own times. William Blake was such a person, seeing at the end of the eighteenth century a glimpse of the future shock to be caused by industrialization and a machinery-dominated society.

The current state of theory and knowledge in the teaching of English is, at best, confusing. On the one hand, we have artifacts of an orthodoxy which seems to be well established and operational. This orthodoxy is observable in the apparent unity of approach taken by most English teachers. To learn to read, children are given basal readers that approach the task either

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from the view of letter-sound decoding or from the whole-word approach. To learn to write, students are given writing tasks and are graded on their control of mechanics. To learn to speak Standard English, children are drilled in irregular verbs and various other demons or, if their problems are severe enough, they are given drills based on the second language learning approach. Textbooks in the English language are usually of two types. Either they blatantly continue the long history of plagiarism from eighteenth century grammarians, or they masquerade as linguistic by adapting Noam Chomsky's 1957 model of generative grammar to a composition paradigm. Other sub-components of the English curriculum, such as spelling, along pretty much as they always have, and if the teacher of eleven year olds plays her cards right, she may find it possible to kill as many as four class periods a week by giving pretests and tests or by having her students first write the words in sentences and then mark them diacritically.

On the other hand, the teaching of English may take a totally non-orthodox approach. Teachers who have been influenced by Marshall McLuhan may decide that it is no longer necessary to either read or write since electronics have taken over the communications in society as we now know it. Reading teachers, alternatively, may be influenced by Sylvia Ashton Warner's organic approach to reading, which seems to allow reading skills to grow out of contextual relevance rather than from regimented teachers' manuals. In America, it is becoming fashionable to state that it is no longer necessary to speak Standard English for, it is alleged, it may be crippling to a child's sense of dignity to change his speech patterns.

One of the curious things about both the orthodox and the revolutionary approaches to the teaching of English is that the problem is assumed to be the child's. It is almost inevitable that the child is conceived of as lacking something or other, else he

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would surely have learned otherwise. In the United States, the current mania for accountability through standardized tests has contributed to this deficiency model of the American child. Educators, as might be expected, were quick to assess the importance of a child's language. It is only natural that problems would be noticed first in the frustrations of teaching. As is often the case when there is a sudden awakening to a social or pedagogical problem, the development of theory, materials and the training of personnel relating to the general area of the English language was dictated by expediency more than by any careful, well developed plan. As absurd as it may seem to produce classroom materials before establishing a theoretical base for their development, that is exactly what happened in this field. To complicate matters even more, sensitive teachers, realizing that their training had not been adequate for their needs, began asking for that training, preferably in condensed and intensive packages. And healthy as this situation appeared to be, it only triggered still another problem--that of finding adequately prepared professionals to provide this training. Thus today's problems in the teaching of English cannot be said to have their locus only in the child. There are several places to search for solutions: in research, in teacher preparation, and in the students themselves.

PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH

Research in the teaching of English must be preceeded by research in English, for it would be indeed fruitless to develop ways of teaching erroneous or useless information. To use the terms of statisticians, it might produce high reliability but low validity.

A decade or so ago, linguists were talking about having a grammar of English written within 50 years or so if productivity proceeded at the then current pace. Five years ago, the target date was changed by a few hundred years. Today, with all we know

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about how language seems to work, the completion date seems more like light-years away.

One problem in current research in language is that the different disciplines which engage in it do so from somewhat different research assumptions. Psychologists' early word in this area quite naturally followed the framework of experimental psychology, including pre- and post-testing, experimental and control groups and other research techniques which are perfectly appropriate when the experimental variables are pure. In the case of the language of disadvantaged children, however, the variables had not yet been isolated and most of the early work of the sixties treated the speech of disadvantaged children as a deviation from a non-disadvantaged norm rather than as a culturally patterned difference. One surely cannot blame psychologists for approaching the language problems of disadvantaged children from the research assumptions with which they were most familiar, but it has become increasingly clear that the psychologists' preference for comparative and correlational research methodologies tends to overlook the need for a preceeding ethnological and linguistic description.

The field of speech, like psychology and education, has held to the assumption that the normal or the correct are definable primarily in light of Standard English language production. The common measures of speech behaviour in this field, the Goldman-Fristoe Articulation Test, The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Ability, are all based on Standard English. Although speech clinicians are continuously engaged in descriptive research in a diagnostic mode, little or no significant research on the form and function of various social dialects is being undertaken by speech specialists. There is a growing awareness, however, that extant training programs for speech clinicians do not prepare these specialists adequately in the differences between socially induced language variation and actual pathologies. The literature now

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abounds with horror stories of black children who were given
ech therapy when their speech was quite acceptable in the
black community.

Anthropologists and linguists share many of the same research assumptions and the history of these fields in relationship to the language problems of the disadvantaged are so intertwined that it is more profitable to view them together. American anthropologists such as Boas, Kroeber and Herskovitz viewed cultures descriptively rather than against some norm from which deviation takes place. Concepts such as "primitive language", "underdeveloped speech" or "sub-standard grammar" were denounced, in the anthropological tradition, as pure ethnocentrism. Linguists adopted this tradition, rejecting the language norms of a familiar society as measures of those of an unfamiliar one. Thus, when linguists examine the speech of disadvantaged children they tend not to view it as deviant but rather, simply as different. Thus when psychologists such as Carl Bereiter and Sigfried Engelmann observe that certain black children suffer cognitive deficits because of their inability to produce Standard English, linguists are quick to be suspicious of these claims.

Anthropologists and linguists also assume the adequacy of all behaviour and language systems as communication systems for members of the social groups which use them. Thus, when non-linguists label disadvantaged children as verbally destitute or linguistically deficient, linguists seriously question their labels. Linguists tend to account for the same child-language behaviour as a sign of the child's unfamiliarity with the particular language production context in which the label was originally attached or as an indication that the language elicitor or monitor is interfering in some way with the normal language flow.

Anthropologists and linguists further agree that behaviour and

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language are systematic and ordered. Linguists therefore reject the interpretations of many educators and speech therapists that specific social dialects are irregular and faulty.

Finally, linguists affirm that language is learned in the context of the community. To be sure, relatively little research will support exactly how the community affects this learning. We know that parents are influential and that if parents speak a particular social dialect, the child is apt to be influenced to a certain extent by it. We also know that once the child's peer group is established, it somehow takes precedence over the parents as an influence on his speech. Again, it is not clear exactly what the parameters of these influences are. It is small wonder then, that linguists take a dim view of education programs which are built around the assumption that the parent is the effective speech model or, even less convincing, programs that assume that the surrogate parent or teacher is an active model or influence on child speech.

With such differences in beginning research assumptions it is no small accident that continuous conflict seems to exist between the various fields. The general polarity seems to concern the nature of language variation. Anthropologists and linguists tend to think of variation as healthy and normal, a manifestation of different but equal groups of speakers. Psychologists and educators, on the other hand, tend to view such variation as more threatening evidences of some sort of deviation from a norm.

As might be expected, different disciplines have approached the study when internal and external pressured seemed to require it, with surface eruptions preceeding in the fields more immediate to the action. Educators and psychologists, who first felt the pressures, answered the call applying the strategies and assumptions of their own disciplines. Once linguists, social scientists and

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and speech specialists entered the discussion, they also tended to follow their own comfortable techniques. Even among linguists, however, access to the study of linguistic variation has been varied. The current renewal of interest in language variability has come about as a result of a number of coalescing factors from the study of dialect, from ethnographic studies, from stylistics, from research in pidginization and creolization and from linguistic theory. For over a decade, the focus in linguistics was on code alone and not on the behaviour through which the code was transmitted. More recently, it has become increasingly respectable to try to account for variability within linguistics per se. More specifically there are those who think it is possible to incorporate non-linguistic information which explains variability into the grammatical rules. These linguists argue that traditional generative grammar is too static to account for such variability and that linguists will need to re-structure their long cherished analytical modes for newer ones which contain layers of variability based on clearly marked constraints. There are others who feel that a kind of implicational scaling exists in language and that the presence of one marked feature in a sequence clearly predicts which variables will follow in a domino-like, linear order. Still other approaches are currently being developed, evidence of a drastic shift in focus in a current linguistics which has taken code-only analysis as far as it can be taken without a satisfying sense of completeness.

Recent research in native language acquisition has been helpful to the teaching of English in a number of ways. For one thing, if we can specify the nature of the direction in native language acquisition, we might be able to make predictions for a logical sequencing of instruction. Recent research in the acquisition of a first language has specified when we might expect children to be able to distinguish between sentences like:

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1. John tells Mary to jump up and down.
2. John promises Mary to jump up and down.

In sentences like number one, the object of the verb tells will do the action, in keeping with the minimal distance principle that the noun closer to the infinitive serves as its subject. In sentence number two, the subject, John, also serves as the subject of the infinitive, violating this principle of minimal distance. Carol Chomsky has pointed out that as children mature in their understanding of English syntax, they will gradually learn to distinguish between these two otherwise identical classes of verbs. Some children at age six are beginning to make this distinction. Others do not make it until many months later. Likewise, Ray Rackley has discovered that the acquisition of indirect question syntax seems to be generally acquired at about age ten. The following sentences are illustrative:

3. Mary said, "I will go home."
4. Mary said that she would go home.

The complexities involved in such syntactical embedding involve adding the relativizer that and changing the pronoun and tense markers. Such an operation is not to be expected of children in the early grades.

Features of language acquisition such as the preceeding may seem relatively unimportant in the training of teachers unless one considers the fact that many published reading programs have not taken such matters into consideration. Occasionally, children are asked to read sentences like:

5. Jerry swung his bat. Over the fence went the ball.
6. Round is a kitten.

The second sentence in number five begins with a prepositional phrase followed by a predicate even though few, if any, children (or adults) speak sentences like this. Sentence number six is syntactically

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unpredictable. It is metaphorical (by definition, unpredictable) and the association of roundness with a kitten is implied rather than stated. The problem of when a child is ready to handle metaphor in reading remains open for debate but if it is important to preserve predictability in beginning reading, the effect of metaphor should be assessed.

In any case, it is important that English teachers have base-line knowledge of how children acquire language so that they can determine what to expect of children and how to determine when the difficulty is the child's and when it is a result of ineffectiveness of the teaching. An analogous situation exists today in the field of speech therapy. The major attention of speech clinicians is said to be on speech pathologies such as stuttering, late acquisition of development, and therapy resulting from cleft palate or injuries of some sort. Unless speech therapists are given specific training into the nature of socially induced language variation, however, it will be difficult for them to determine with certainty whether r-lessness or some other linguistic phenomenon is a result of a pathology or a social environment. Children who speak the regional and social dialects of their home communities cannot be considered pathological. They are not ill or injured; the problem is not physical or emotional. A child speaks the language that he hears and reveres. That is all we can expect him to do.

The English teacher should know what to expect of a child's acquisition of language along a time line but also in the various social and situational dimensions. She should know something about the various types of language variation that exist in his language, especially in terms of region and society. It may seem paradoxical that children are urged to vary the vocabulary and grammar patterns of their written compositions but are down-graded when their

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pronunciation and grammar vary from the accepted norm of the classroom, but this situation most assuredly exists. The current research of educators concerning the language problems of the disadvantaged suffers greatly by being out of sequence. The educator's job is primarily to interpret for the classroom the analyses of some preceeding descriptive studies. The problem is obvious. If the preceeding description has not been made, analysis will not have been complete and sensitive interpretation will be impossible. It has been pointed out already that psychologists have faced the same kind of problem. An accurate ethnographic and linguistic description has to precede language analysis and prescription. In the United States, such descriptions are only beginning to be made. At this time we have useful research on the social dimensions of language from urban areas such as New York by Labov, Detroit by Shuy, Wolfram and Riley and Washington, D.C. by Fasold. Many more such studies are underway and they have been showing very vividly that social stratification clearly exists in language performance and that, in the United States, there is a distinct pattern of the speech of Negroes in widely separated Northern urban areas which is not essentially different from that of their ancestors in the rural South. Even more broadly, variation in the use of certain grammatical and phonological features has been shown to correlate neatly with sex, age, socio-economic status, race and style, leading us to a clearer picture of the state of language variation than we have ever had before.

Research in teaching standard English to speakers of non-standard varieties in the United States has been beset with emotional overtones in recent years.

Research in teaching standard English to speakers of non-standard varieties in the United States has been beset with emotional overtones in recent years. Despite these problems, several programs for

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teaching standard English to disadvantaged, especially black children, were developed during the sixties. Such programs can be characterized as isolative, generally based on little or no descriptive data of the way their populations actually talk, and pedagogically generalized from foreign language teaching methodology.

In a recent study for the U.S. Office of Education, staff members at The Center for Applied Linguistics surveyed extant materials intended to teach oral standard English to native speakers of English. An intensive survey over a period of a year's time turned up 31 full or partial sets of such materials. The difficulties encountered in locating such programs and in extracting copies of the materials from the authors indicates the uncertainty of the field today. The fact that few materials developers could give accurate "leads" about competing programs supported the survey staff's informal evidence that material developers in this field have worked in almost total isolation from each other. These materials can be divided into three levels: primary (14 sets), secondary (10 sets) and adult (7 sets). Most were produced by special materials development groups working in or closely with a school system. About half of them consist only of a teacher's manual, six programs include tapes and four have student books as part of the instructional package. In almost every case, the materials lean heavily on foreign language teaching techniques while student tests and general program evaluation were conspicuously weak throughout.

The general lack of input from linguistic research in most of these programs is evident in a number of ways. Over half of them fail to mention how the specific features dealt with were selected for inclusion. Those which deal primarily with pronunciation reveal that the authors are not familiar with the research which demonstrates that grammatical features are more socially stigmatizing than various pronunciations.

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Of the three commonly held approaches to teaching standard English to speakers of various non-standards, i.e. eradication, bi-dialectalism and a difficult to label approach in which it is advocated that standard English speakers be taught to know and/or appreciate non-standard varieties of the language, most programs purport to be bi-dialectal. Still, one primary program refers to the dialect of a disadvantaged child as "an inadequate verbal system". Two of the adult programs call dialect incorrect and standard English correct. Even among the supposedly bi-dialectal materials, however, one frequently gets the clear impression that the approach is really remedial.

In terms of pedagogical strategies, about half of the programs restrict their activities to audio-lingual methodology; that is, pattern practice drills with repetition. This is particularly characteristic of secondary and adult programs but not so much on the elementary level, where this methodology is more apt to be combined with group games and other activities. Only five of the programs make any overt use of the students' dialect, despite the long-held educational principle of "starting with the child where he is". All five used non-standard dialect to compare it with standard English, opening the door to learning by contrast. Since these programs admit the possibility that non-standard varieties are perfectly appropriate in certain language contexts (such as in the football huddle), the emphasis is not on eradicating the non-standard, but rather on teaching the student to recognize the appropriate contexts in which to switch from one system to another.

In addition to the teaching of standard English to native English speakers, considerable discussion has taken place among educators concerning the role of non-standard speech in the child's acquisition of reading skills. Concern for the possible interference of the speech of black working class children on their learning to read was manifested in the Chicago Public Schools' Psycholinguistics

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Reading Program (Leaverton, Gladney and Davis, 1968), in a collection of articles on the subject called Teaching Black Children to Read (Baratz and Shuy, 1969) and in the materials currently being developed by Joan Baratz and William A. Stewart.

There are currently at least four models of reading instruction which attempt to relate in some way to the child's non-standard language:

1. First, teach the child standard English.
2. Accept the child's oral rendering in his own dialect of material written in standard English.
3. Develop materials in standard English which minimize dialect and cultural differences.
4. Develop materials which incorporate the grammar of disadvantaged black children.

At the moment, it is difficult to prove or disprove any of these models. Unlike the hard sciences, where a clear scientific base makes research more controllable, educational research suffers from galloping variables that make experimental control difficult, if not impossible. What we are left with is a series of hypotheses to be tested, then affirmed or rejected. Since we know relatively little about how humans learn how they process language input or control its output and how their knowledge and use of language relates to all this, we are probably doing well to operate even at the level of hypotheses. What we are finally beginning to know something about, however, is the broad outline of the linguistic system of the target population. It would seem reasonable to try to utilize this small segment of what may be called a scientific base in connection with reasonable hypotheses about the acquisition of reading skills. All four models should be thoroughly tested.

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PROBLEMS OF TEACHER PREPARATION

One of the more incredible things about the education system in the United States is that the training of English teachers has proceeded, to date, with practically no emphasis on training future teachers to hear, distinguish and analyze the language that the child brings with him to school and to which most of his reading will relate. How much less incredible is it that certain unfounded language stereotypes are preserved, even nourished, in the training program of future teachers who are often told that certain children have few experiences, that they do not use language in their homes, that they must be taught their language, that school will provide a language model and that language mistakes are to be avoided and corrected. Such training, usually offered in only one or two courses at the undergraduate level, manages to instill most of these stereotypes before the teacher even sees her first live pupil.

The most important focus in the child's early education centers around language. It is his only tool for communicating with the adult world, thereby enabling teachers to evaluate him and teach him. One of the most logical subjects for teachers to study, therefore, is the language of children. In order to study the language of children, it is important for teachers to study language in a broad sense, especially as linguists see it. Teachers need to know about the systematic nature of language, how languages differ from each other, how they change, the difference between oral and written symbolization, and the structure of communication. They should be made at least minimally aware of current theoretical views of linguistics. No extant college linguistics courses are likely to meet this need exactly. Courses called "Introduction to linguistics" as they are now conceived by linguistics departments are probably not what future teachers need. Nor are the college courses in the structure of the history of the English language immediately applicable. If linguists have not developed a course which suits the need of future elementary

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teachers, it is high time they were made to develop such a course along with knowledgeable specialists in education. Students with special abilities in this course should, upon completion, be encouraged to take further work in general linguistics courses. Perhaps the best way to get into the intricacies of child language is to come into close contact with children. On all sides, education is being critized these days for its dramatic isolation of training from the real world. Perhaps some things in the establishment of both school systems and universities have prevented this placement of teachers in the schools until the last quarter of their senior year but it has become apparent that there is no time to tolerate the situation any longer. A language emphasis in the training program provides an easy rationale for early entry of future teachers into the real-school situation. Nothing could be more useful in the training of English teachers than giving them assignments in field work on child language, in speech, reading and writing. After the teacher has been trained in phonetic skills, grammatical analysis and language acquisition, she should be given a tape recorder, some field technique training (especially in question-asking strategies) and turned loose to get speech samples of real children. Certain techniques can be borrowed from existing materials (word games, narration, oral reading, sentence imitation and other communicative routines) but the major value of such work lies in the individual future teacher-pupil contact as much as in the ultimate analysis of the language data. It is difficult to justify keeping future teachers away from real children, at least on the basis of anything we have taught them in the past. Much of what we teach them about the history and structure of American education could be happily elimated or deferred and most of the necessary content in math, social studies and science could be condensed and focused. If the

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general education lock-step could be subverted, it would be possible to place future teachers in the classroom by the end of two or, at most, two and one-half years at college. As those of us who have returned to college courses after some teaching experience will attest, it takes some reality for the abstractions of college to become meaningful. The point of these suggestions, though limited primarily to the effect which the study of language can have on the training of teachers, is that special methods and techniques of instruction are fairly meaningless until the student has some notion of what in the world they might mean. The rest of the students' courses, whether they focus on methods, history, visual aids, philosophy, psychology or children's literature could be deferred until after the student has spent a school-year in the classroom. But if the student gets into the classroom first for a reasonable length of time, he will have reason to suspect that these courses may be in some way useful. If not, he may reject them with no loss of confidence caused by the insecurity of never having taught.

One further benefit will surely accrue to the teacher who has developed competencies in the language aspects of his task. That is that he will be able to keep his tasks separated. One important aspect of teaching reading, for example, is that the teacher knows that learning to read is not the same as learning standard English. These tasks have been strangely confused in the past to the extent that a child who reads "He go to the store" for "He goes to the store" is said to have a reading problem. In most cases, this reading can be construed as evidence that the child has indeed read very well--so well, in fact, that he did what good readers presumably are expected to do: to put the information found on the printed page into his own language system.

One of the most important aspects involved in the language problems of children, therefore, focuses on teachers' imprecise

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descriptions of the problem, their ignorance of how to make such descriptions and on their imperfect knowledge about the group of human beings they are presumably teaching. It is not inappropriate to observe that the linguistic sophistication of teachers is currently quite limited.

It seems very clear, then, that teachers need to learn about the current research in language, why the research is being done, how it is carried out, what is known at the moment and, every bit as important, what is not known. Further, teachers need to take cognizance of their own language in relation to that of their pupils. They need to understand language variation--the reasons underlying it and the attitudes of various subcultures toward it. Teachers should learn to listen to the language of their students. They should find out how systematic the language of children can be and they should develop a sensitivity to the editing processes that take place as one person listens to another.

In short, the preparation of English teachers must be overhauled to put language at the center of the program, accompanied wherever possible by courses in administration, techniques and evaluation. It is an indisputable fact that the most important tool for survival, for communicating and for obtaining knowledge and skills is language. This is as true for middle class children as for disadvantaged socio-economic groups. But if the circumstances under which disadvantaged children acquire this tool militate in some way against their acquiring middle class language patterns, some kind of special attention must be given to them. This special attention requires the teacher to develop an ability to learn how to deal with a child's language, how to listen and respond to it, how to diagnose what is needed, how to best teach alternate linguistic systems and how to treat it as a positive and healthy entity.

THE PROBLEM OF STUDENTS

What is the real world, linguistically; that surrounds the

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child when he enters the first grade? He hears language all around him--from peers, from parents, from teachers and from television. Some hear more than others but there is no evidence to support the claims of some researchers that certain disadvantaged children live in some sort of verbal isolation. In fact, it is difficult even to imagine how data supporting such a thesis might be accumulated. The presence of the researcher normally has a negative effect on the quantitative production of speech and the child soon learns that the safest way to avoid being wrong is to keep his mouth shut.

It is this fear of error-making which is at the very heart of one of the serious problems in English teaching today. It is difficult to imagine a foreign language class in which a child is not allowed certain leeway in mistake-making. There is practically no way to learn to speak a foreign language without being allowed to make errors of some sort. To try is to admit the possibility of error. To err is to be vulnerable and, to a certain extent, insecure. For some reason, these obvious facts have been obscure to teachers of English of native speakers, who have operated on the erroneous assumption that error-making is always a bad thing.

To show that error-making can be taken as an example of the positive acquisition of native language proficiency is not difficult. Black children in urban northern communities of America are consistently said to produce <u>desses</u> as the plural form of <u>desk</u>. To the teacher this seems to be an error equal to any other possible error. The frequent prescription for such behavior is to provide the children with a lesson on noun plurals. Closer examination of this situation will reveal, however, that the black child who says <u>desses</u> is following perfectly logical rules of pluralization. Like other English speakers, he has learned that there are three ways of making plurals in English, depending on what consonant ends the base of the word. Words ending in voiceless stops such as /p,t,k/ (sip, cat, kick) take /s/for their plural. Words ending in voiced

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stops such as /b, d, g/(rub, bed, bag) take /z/ for pluralization. Words ending in the sounds /č, ǰ, s, š, z, ž/(church, judge, bus, bush, buzz, garage) take/əz/as their plural. The child who says desses is not in need of training in grammar. He produced dess as the singular form and then proceeds to follow the regular morphophonemic rule for pluralization. If he is to be taught anything, it is that the singular form of desk ends with a /k/, not an /s/. The point here is that desses is not just a run-of-the-mill error. It is, quite the contrary, clear evidence that the child has mastered the regular rules of pluralization. On the other hand, children who produce deskes as the plural may indicate that they are somewhere along the continuum of learning the standard form, for they are now producing the entire consonant cluster /sk/ even though they continue to use the pluralization rule formerly used with bases ending in /s/. To a certain extent, this could be considered an error, yet it seems to show progress of the child in the acquisition of the standard form.

It is relatively clear that learning often costs the learner something. Recently at a fish market I observed an eight or nine year old girl crying in her mother's arms. I asked what her problem was and her mother told me that the girl had just come to the realization that in order for her to eat fish, the fish had to have its head chopped off. Somehow this had never occurred to her before and her new knowledge had caused her great anguish. Along similar lines, both of my sons went through the acquisition of -en participles with some cost to acceptability. Once they acquired the notion of -en participles, they began using them in many remarkable ways, as have playen, have tellen and have jumpen. Both recovered from this malady rather quickly and now lead rather normal linguistic lives.

The notion that error-making can be good is a difficult concept for teachers to understand. An American child who spells basement

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as basemint may only be reflecting his well developed ability to correlate symbols to sounds, especially if he happens to come from that part of the country that has a generalized / I / - /ɛ/ collapse before nasal consonants (pen and pin are homophones). In any case, basemint is a considerably better mistake than bsftlr or slrfqw. But the great temptation is to mark them all equally wrong and fail to differentiate their wrongness.

In the teaching of composition skills, the notion that all wrongs are equal has long endured. The absurdity to which this dictum can be taken was recently seen in a large American university which admitted a thousand inner-city black freshmen, then proceeded to fail most of them on the basis of their lack of writing skills. A study done of a sample of the composition of these students showed that 42% of all errors marked by the teachers were directly related to the pronunciation of black vernacular English as reflected in spelling and to black vernacular morphology which was frequently transmitted in the grammatical constructions of the writers. The errors, in these cases, were largely predictable on the basis of the writers' oral language. This sort of error is quite different from the usual clues given the composition teacher. In fact, if the teachers only knew it, their task was in some way easier for the problems of writing in this case are more easily segmented than those of more typical students. Recent research in the structure of black vernacular English is readily available to American teachers, if only they were well enough trained in language to be able to assimilate it.

We have said that the domain of error-making in English is the root of many of the students' classroom problems. Children must be allowed to engage in a certain amount of penalty-free error-making if they are to feel free and creative enough to participate in their own search for knowledge. Their teachers should be perceptive enough to determine that error-making can reveal stages in the acquisition of the desired

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or mature form and that the acquisition of one layer of knowledge often causes the temporary imbalance of another layer. Perhaps most important of all, however, is the kind of error-making which penalizes the child whose wrong answer is as creative, or more so, than the expected response. My younger son came home from school the other day with a quiz on antonyms in which he had one error. The stimulus word was <u>came</u>, to which he responded that the antonym was <u>left</u>. His teacher insisted that the correct answer was <u>went</u>, not <u>left</u>. I asked Joel what he thought about it, to which he replied: "Dad, you just have to remember that sometimes school doesn't make much sense." The idea that a question could have two or more right answers just doesn' occur to many teachers who seem bound to the sterility of answer keys. The creative child may be penalized, as was the one who responded to the question, "How do you measure the height of a building using a barometer?" with the answer, "You tell the owner that you'll give him a barometer if he tells you how tall his building is."

Another factor often overlooked in the relationship of the child to the teaching of English has to do with masculinity. Among many groups of boys today it is as true as it was in my own youth that being considered <u>masculine</u> was far more important than being considered a good student. If you happened to be a good athlete or if you were singularly blessed with an early growth of facial hair and deepening voice, you did not have the problem quite as acutely. But those of us whose bodies had unceremoniously failed them soon discovered that masculinity could be expressed by choice of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation--and also by avoiding the appearance of intelligence--at least in public encounters when our peers could hear it. In our recent studies of the most stigmatizing aspects of speech, every grammatical and phonological feature which we have examined shows a clear male dominance, regardless

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of the age, race or socio-economic status of the speaker. Girls are simply more standard English-speaking than boys. Since girls are more agile with language, this suggests something important about how they are taught. Most teachers on all levels will observe that girls are more linguistically talented than boys. In many cases, this reflects only the female domination of the classroom and the whole question of linguistic correlates of sex is a part of the larger matter of female values in the overall teaching situation, ranging anywhere from deductive rather than inductive learning to the great premium placed on quietness in the schools. William Labov, in fact, has studied one aspect of this problem, observing that illiteracy in a teen-age New York gang member is directly proportionate to his acceptance by the peer-group. And despite the post-Sputnik emphasis on education, many intelligent boys who are more concerned about peer-group status than teacher approval will clam up in the classroom even though they may be perfectly able to respond to their teacher's questions.

This seems to be the case in at least some elementary reading programs where boys are consistently ranked lower than girls in reading ability. Much to my surprise, I learned a few years ago that one of the most time-honored methods of assessing reading ability is through oral reading. Boys tended to read in a monotone while girls tended to read, as the teachers put it, "with expression". One question we might ask of teachers who evaluate on this basis is whether or not the perceived masculine role is one of tough monotones rather than feminine range variation? I suspect that it is.

With respect to the child then, one thing seems rather sure. There is not very much he can do about how he was born or the environment in which he has grown by the time we first see him in first grade. We also know now that he comes to us with a relatively well developed language which is systematic even when it differs from school English and which cannot be characterized as random or

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illogical. In his recent article, "The Logic of Non-Standard English", William Labov puts to rest for good the widely held, but erroneous, notion that nonstandard speech is a signal of mental inadequacy. For far too many years now the general public and the schools have assumed the position recently espoused by Carl Bereiter, who observes: "...the language of culturally deprived children . . . is not merely an underdeveloped version of standard English, but is a basically non-logical mode of expressive behaviour.". In order to overcome this illogicality and underdevelopment, this psychologist urges teachers to proceed as though the children have no language at all and to train children to speak in fully explicit formal language. The absurdity of these admonitions becomes evident when we examine the solutions to the illogicality and underdevelopment. Bereiter argues for unelliptical responses to questions (for example, The squirrel is in the tree is preferred over in the tree) as though, somehow, the full unelliptical form is the well developed and logical version from which all other versions diverge. Current linguistics clearly argues that the semantics of each of these sentences is the same and that there are only superficial surface structure differences between them.

The student also faces a problem when he is evaluated for his language ability in English. The recent mania for accountability in America has sent school systems scurrying for nationally normed standardized tests. The fruitlessness of this mania may be seen in the National Assessment of Writing Skills in which the four age groups (elementary, junior high, high school and adult groups) were given the stimulus of a picture depicting a forest fire about which they were to write a composition. On the basis of these compositions a national standard is to be constructed even though the writers were not allowed to proofread their papers and even though they were never told for whom they were writing this description.

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A close look at standardized reading tests will reveal a host of features which are dialectally or culturally biased and an equal number of questions and pictures are mystifyingly ambiguous. Occasionally the question discriminates against good readers, as in the case of the paragraph-reading question which asks the student to remember certain insignificant details about the paragraph despite the fact the the good reader will have learned to submerge or ignore the unimportant details and remember only the important ones. Oddly enough, such questions penalize the good reader at the expense of the weaker one.

The child who learns to cope with the world of standardized tests will have learned a skill which is highly useful in the classroom but which may be too specialized to be of any use thereafter. At a recent meeting of the American Educational Research Association one reading scholar pointed out that he had been doing interesting research on question-answering behaviour of students in reading tests. He pointed out that he had begun giving students the answers to select among without providing any semblence of a question. There seemed to be little difference in their scores one way or the other, suggesting to him that there is a kind of language of right answers which gives away their correctness even in isolation from their question.

The language problems of non-standard English-speaking children has been the focus of a great deal of recent research in the Unites States. What is apparently meant by the non-standard dialect problem of the student is only that the child's speech does not correlate, one-to-one, with the expected speech patterns of the classroom. Several years ago, linguists began to try to determine exactly what this lack of exact correlation really meant. This is not the place to catalogue the research involved or to go into detail about it. But several important aspects of this research can be noted.

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For one thing, nobody whose speech was studied intensively in certain Northern ghetto communities produced the non-standard form in all places and under all circumstances. If we listen long enough, if we talk about the right topics and if we do not intimidate him, he will produce a stream of speech that, much of the time, is standard in its grammar and some of the time may be stigmatized in its grammar and pronunciation. He may occasionally produce a vocabulary item that is related to street topics or some special jargon, but the listener will find that the aspects of his speech which are most stigmatized are grammar items.

The following aspects of grammar and phonology have been noted by Ralph Fasold and Walt Wolfram as major areas of stigmatization in the non-standard speech used by urban Northern blacks:

PRONUNCIATION

1. Word final consonant clusters such as the -st in test and missed or the -nd in find or canned.
2. The th sounds in all positions as in think, nothing and tooth.
3. r and l before consonants or at the ends of words as in help and sister.
4. The devoicing of deletion of word final b, d and g as in pig, salad and good.
5. The collapse of /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ before nasal consonants as in pen/pin.
6. Vowel glides monophthongize as in dime.
7. Simplification of a-an distinctions as in a egg.
8. First syllable stress in words that otherwise have second syllable stress as in hotel and police.

GRAMMAR

1. The -ed influction as in missed, started and said is not actualized.

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2. The presence of certain perfective constructions as in I done forgot and I been had it.
3. No present tense verb third singular marker as in He walk, He have a car and He don't go.
4. Future expressed as He gonna go, I'ma go or He see you tomorrow.
5. The presence of a grammatical category, not found in standard English, called invariant be as in Sometime he be busy.
6. Non-actualized forms of the verb to be as in He a good man.
7. The use of ain't in the sense of isn't as well as didn't as in He ain't here and He ain't do that, respectively.
8. The extensive use of multiple negation as in Nobody didn't know nothing.
9. Non-actualized possessive markers as in the boy coat, and different possessive marker actualization as in This be he book and It mines.
10. Non-actualized plural markers as in five book, and dual actualizations as in two mens.
11. The embedded question structure, I want to know can he come out?.
12. The extensive use of pronominal apposition as in My mother she went shopping.
13. The use of existential it as in It's a lot of people out front.

It must be noted, however, that most of the preceeding features can be found also in the speech of many non-blacks who live in economically depressed areas. The differences between standard and non-standard speech, then, are not always a matter of presence versus absence of a given feature. Instead, the difference is often a matter of frequency of occurrence. This may be a difficult concept to grasp but it remains a fact that there is a distinct correlation between the frequency of occurrence of certain stigmatized grammatical and

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phonological features and socio-economic status, style, age, race and sex. Thus black children are said to use multiple negatives before indefinites ("I don't have none."), even though white children also produce such utterances. The phenomenon is stigmatized in the school environment in both cases and the grammatical feature cannot be considered black vernacular English alone. The difference between its use by blacks and by whites of the same socio-economic status is entirely quantitative. Both use multiple negatives but research has pointed out that blacks use them more frequently.

The preceeding distinction can be made of many of the grammatical and phonological characteristics of black vernacular English. Some characteristics, however, are almost categorically black. Included among them are the iterative be, "Most of the time he be here.", but not the be which results from will or would reduction, "He be here tomorrow." and "He be here if he could.", respectively, which can be found among many whites as well. Also on that list would be all three -s forms; noun plurals, verb third singular present tense and possessive nouns. After the basic acquisition of the native language is completed, there are few documented cases of whites using these forms without -s.

Such a list as the one above, therefore, must be used with caution. Not all non-standard speakers will use all of these forms. Not all such speakers will use them to the same extents or in the same contexts. These features do not represent pure black vernacular English nor any kind of pure non-standard speech. Instead they represent some of the things we now know about this highly complex area.

Research of this sort has led us one small step closer to an answer to the question of what it is that causes people's speech to be stigmatized. A great many things remain to be done.

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We know little about corresponding aspects of intonation or voice quality. We have only partial information about what happens during style shifting and code switching and relatively little information about the acquisition of social dialects during the early years of childhood and many other things.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have suggested some of the issues involved in a description of the current theory and knowledge for the teaching of English. I have stressed that there are problems on at least three levels: research, teacher training and students. The catalogue of problems noted therein is in no way exhaustive or adequate. It is meant to suggest certain dimensions of the problem and provide ways of thinking about solutions.

One thing should be kept clearly in focus throughout, however, and that is that the study of the English language has the potential for becoming the unifying factor in the entire curriculum. If teachers are adequately prepared in language (to the extent that they can use it as a viable tool for accurate diagnosis and remediation), they have in their hands the tool to do for each child what it takes many years for some people to accomplish--the relationship of the many courses taken to each other. Personally, I was a junior in college before the interrelationship of my courses occurred to me. This is a kind of tragedy which should be avoided.

The study of the English language has about it, first of all, the ability to be treated as a science. Handled properly, language study can be seen to be an active embodiment of the inductive method. Children can be easily induced to gather data on the way their parents and neighbors talk, the words they use as well as their pronunciations and grammar. Then how natural it can become to study adjectives, embedded sentences and other matters in the context of real life speech. Language study can also lead to a vivid

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relationship with geography and history, for the settlement history of a given area can be reflected many years later in residual regional dialects. The study of the English language can also reveal interesting social and psychological insights, for much recent sociolinguistic work indicates how language stratifies people socially. Last, it can be demonstrated that the study of the English language plays a crucial role in the analysis of literature, particularly as characterization is revealed through dialogue and as social interaction networds are built through subtle uses of language.

The English teacher would do well to capitalize on this potential unifying force. It may well be that no other discipline has as much to offer.

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